

MEET MARY BROOKS PICKEN

At ASG Conference 2016, Mary Brooks Picken was inducted posthumously into the ASG Sewing Hall of Fame.

Mary Brooks Picken was born on August 6, 1886 in Arcadia, Kansas. Not much of her early life was documented but it was apparent from an early age was that she had a knack for sewing. While still very young, she set off for a career in fashion that took her to Kansas City and later to Boston, where she further refined her dressmaking skills. As was the custom, she married young and began a traditional home life that would later directly influence her career path as the first American authority on home arts and founder of a school dedicated to the domestic arts.



PHOTO © AMY BARICKMAN

In 1916, she founded the Woman's Institute of Domestic Arts & Sciences in Scranton, Pa.. Like online schools of today, the Institute was a correspondence school that used classroom instruction in dressmaking, millinery, cooking, fashion design, beauty, and homemaking. The school's enrollment reached 300,000 at one point, becoming the largest school in history solely dedicated to the education of women. The school was nothing short of amazing; it was affordable and immediately generated income for women after graduation during a time when women couldn't vote and less than 10 percent of women worked outside the home.

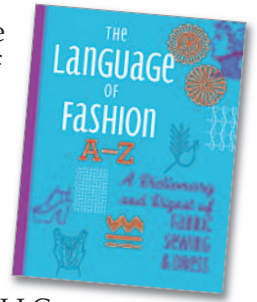
In 1925, Mary moved to New York



City to be the editor of *Pictorial Review*, a popular magazine at the time. It was an era when fashion was roaring, and she often traveled to Paris to cover fashion events. While in New York, Mary had a studio where she held classes, and she also taught at Columbia University. She was the first woman to be named a trustee of the Fashion Institute of Technology and one of the five original directors of The Costume Institute, now a part of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1943, Mary was part of the group who started New York Fashion Week. She faithfully attended fashion shows well into her 80s.

Mary wrote close to 100 books and booklets about dressmaking, pattern-making, hats, foundations, tailoring, aprons, embroidery stitches, remodeling, maternity and infant clothing, etc. These included "Thimblefuls of Friendliness," a popular book published in 1924 that contains timeless wisdom and an everyday philosophy of life, and "The One-Hour Dress and How to Make It," a bestseller that brought her national attention. She also wrote the bible of many home sewers, "The Singer Sewing Book." She was the first woman to publish a

dictionary, "The Language of Fashion A-Z," which is still available today as a newly-issued reproduction from Amy Barickman LLC.



Mary's books didn't just provide information and knowledge on sewing; rather, they provided timeless wisdom on everyday life—how the home arts can promote dignity, joy, meaning, and self-esteem in a woman's life. Mary's pioneering also inspired women to form "Institute Clubs" where women came together, shared with and taught one another.

Mary passed away in 1981 at age 94 with no immediate survivors.

Mary's inspirational essays, clever sewing patterns, cooking basics, and beautiful illustrations from the Institute's newsletters have come to the attention of new generations thanks to Amy Barickman. Amy's book, "Vintage Notions," preserves Mary's work alongside her own extensive collection of vintage textiles, needlework, illustrations, and memorabilia. Amy also publishes



Vintage Notions Monthly, which continues to share the work of Mary Brooks Picken and the Woman's Institute. See ad page 17 and ASG Special Offer on page 48.

Dedication like Mary's is unusual today but her story continues to inspire. It's rare for anyone to devote an entire life to one passion. Mary's commitment to sewing arts and home sewers has left a legacy unmatched to this day. We are delighted to include Mary Brooks Picken in the ASG Sewing Hall of Fame!